



# GIAÙO HOÄI PHAÄT GIAÙO HOØA HAÛO

## Hoa Hao Buddhist Church

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### COVER PAGE

**NAME:**

Bui Thien Hue

**Title and  
Organization Affiliation:**

Hoa Hao Buddhist Religious Dissident  
Overseas Hoa Hao Buddhist Church

**Date of Hearing:**

December 21, 2006

**Name of Congressional Committee**

House Committee on International  
Relations

## **Testimony of Bui Thien Hue**

### **HOA HAO Buddhist Dissident - Former Vietnam Religious Prisoner**

Dear Members of the Committee  
Dear Congressman Christopher Smith:

My name is Bui Thien Hue. I am a Hoa Hao Buddhist and a former religious prisoner. Last June, when I was still in Vietnam, I had the opportunity to submit my written testimony to the members of Congress. Today, I am very grateful to be here in person to brief you on the current situation of Hoa Hao Buddhism in Vietnam. With your indulgence, I would like to do that by telling you my personal story, how I was repressed by the Vietnamese government and how I got to the U.S.

After 1975, Hoa Hao Buddhism has been oppressed for more than 30 years. In 1993, many Hoa Hao Buddhists and I voiced our objection to the Vietnamese government for publishing a book maligning our religious founder – prophet Huynh Phu So. Subsequently, we demanded the government to let us practice our religion openly. In May 1999, under international pressure, the Vietnamese government has to formally recognized Hoa Hao Buddhism as a religion. However, they appointed a handpicked administrative committee to run the Church's affairs. This 21-member Council has been chaired by a 50-year veteran member of the Communist Party.

Due to my objections, I was put under house arrest for 24 months. My mother soon felt critically ill and I had to leave the house to take care of her. For this parole violation, I was given another 36-month sentence for violating decree 31/CP. All of my relatives, including my brother have been continuously harassed by the local police ever since.

In April 2001, I escaped to Cambodia and applied for refugee status at the United Nations Refugee Agency in Phnom Penh. Although I was granted refugee status, the local police force was out to arrest and imprison me. To escape this crackdown, I linked up with six Vietnamese highlanders to escape and hideout in Mondonkiri, a province in the North-Eastern part of Cambodia. We managed to lay low for 3 months. However, under the pressure from the Vietnamese government, the Cambodian police force stepped up their search and caught us in July. Again, in compliance to the demands from the Vietnamese government, the Cambodian government disregarded my refugee status and repatriated me back to Vietnam. I was immediately sentenced and imprisoned for 36 months at Xuan Loc, Dong Nai.

After 3 long years, I was final freed. I and other Hoa Hao dissidents picked up our struggle for religious freedom. With the help from the **Committee for Religious Freedom and the Southern California Hoa Hao Buddhist Association**, I submitted a written testimony to the U.S. Congress in June of last year to unveil the horrific repression on the Hoa Hao Buddhists in Vietnam. Because of this written testimony, I was again imprisoned. Towards the end of last year, I had the honor to speak to Congressman Smith during his visit to Vietnam. With his help, the help of the two above organizations and Dr. Thang of **Boat People S.O.S**, in September of this year, I was allowed to leave Vietnam via the Priority One program.

Ever since I came to this safe haven ground, rarely have I spent a day not thinking about the rest of the religious prisoners still in Vietnam. They are facing uphill struggles due to constant harassment and intimidation by the authority.

In particular, I missed my friend and fellow Hoa Hao Buddhists – Mr. Vo Van Thanh Liem who was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment; Mr. Le Minh Triet who was beaten for not accepting the house arrest order. My heart aches for my friend Mr. Truong Van Thuc and his brother who have been beaten, thrown into the river and left to die. And I have great concerns for hundreds of other religious dissidents who are suffering in prisons all over the country.

As Dr. Thang, executive director of Boat People S.O.S stated, by repatriated me from Cambodia back to Vietnam, the Vietnamese government was sending a warning message to other dissidents that there is no place to escape from their long-arm of control and punishment. The Priority One program has opened up a route to salvation for the Vietnamese religious prisoners. For that reason, I would like to call for your help in assisting **Boat People S.O.S and the Committee for Religious Freedom** to continue this noble effort.

Dear Sir,

I am but a humble Hoa Hao Buddhist. I don't know much about politics and I don't understand the reason behind the Administration's decision to remove Vietnam from the list of Countries of Particular Concern. But I am a living witness to the undeniable fact that there is still religious repression in Vietnam.

Therefore, I respectfully request the U.S. Congress, the State Department, and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) to work with the government of Vietnam to:

1. Call for the release of all Hoa Hao Buddhist and all other religious prisoners.
2. Closely monitor and report all religious violation and harassment to the world community.
3. Urge the government of Vietnam to allow Hoa Hao Buddhists to choose and vote their own leaders.
4. Return all confiscated Church properties and rebuild our Hoa Hao Buddhist Library, one of our religious and cultural monuments.
5. Allow the Hoa Hao Buddhists to commemorate Prophet Huynh Disappearance day.

Please accept my eternal gratitude for your help in letting me come to the U.S, bringing democracy, human rights and freedom of religion to Vietnam.

Respectfully yours,  
Bui Thien Hue